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AUTHOR Paul, Joan; Shelden, Miriam F.
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ABSTRACT

This paper traces the history of physical education in the American schools from 1850, through the critical years of the Civil War, and up to 1900. Brief biographical sketches are presented of leading physical educators of the time, and the evolution of the American Alliance for Health, Physical Education, Recreation and Dance is described. (JD)

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"The Way We Were: 1850-1900"

Presented by

Dr. Joan Paul
and
Dr. Miriam F. Shelden

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AAHPERD Convention
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"The Way We Were: 1850-1900"

Prior to the 1850s the United States had been exposed to physical education in almost a casual way, and primarily in the Northeastern section of the country. The first known example where physical education was placed in an institutional setting with a teacher especially hired to instruct the students was at Round Hill School in 1825. This experiment with Charles Beck didn't last long, nor did those at Harvard with Charles Follen and then Francis Lieber. There are several examples of physical education being introduced to little informed American audiences before 1900. However, little impact was made with the public or in the school prior to 1850 except for the program of Catharine Beecher, the first native American to develop a fairly comprehensive system of gymnastics.

At mid-century the United States was experiencing a myriad of causative and conflicting problems, such as the population explosion caused by immigration and the resulting over-crowded cities; economic growth and social injustices; poor health practices and reform against sanitary conditions; poor educational practices and efforts to improve education. This half-century, 1850-1900, was a dramatic period filled with hope and disillusionment, a virtual roller coaster of economic, political, social, and educational upheavels. Yet it was in this half-century that a firm foundation for physical education was laid that enabled it to develop and grow into the viable profession it is today.

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The 1850s was the first decade physical education placed its foot in the educational door in a position that proved to be more than a fad as in earlier years. A few of the public schools, particularly around the Boston area, allowed a few minutes of calesthenics a day that decade. The 1850s also witnessed the beginning of intercollegiate sport with a rowing match between Harvard and Yale in 1852 and the first baseball game in 1859 when Amherst bested Williams 66-32. However, it would be many years before athletics and physical education were wed because of administrative expediency perhaps more than philosophical considerations. The 1850s tempered the developments that occurred in the 1860s. Had the Civil War not been a deterrent, physical education probably would have grown rapidly during this time. Even though the War is credited with promoting sport, it caused a 15-year dilatory period in the growth and development of physical education.

Almost like a flower bed with diverse plants opening their petals, a number of diverse personalities appeared on the scene to create situations that had their own peculiar effect on physical education. One of the first nationally publicized characters associated with physical education in the 1850s was George Barker Windship, a controversial personality who probably had a greater influence on the early direction of physical education during the 1850s and '60s than the history books acknowledge. Windship, at 5'6 1/2" and approximately 140 pounds, spread the gospel of physical education through weight lifting feats that caused many educators, physicians, YMCA directors, and the general public to believe that the main objective to be achieved was health through strength. When such a small man could alternately lift 180 lb barbells above his

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head, do sit-ups with 100 lb weights behind his head, chin with either little finger, lift 200 pounds with a little finger and pick up almost 3000 lbs with the use of a shoulder harness, his lectures or the benefits of physical education were very convincing. However, others didn't want anyone to believe that the purpose of physical education was to develop weight lifters.

One such man who spent much of his energy trying to counteract Windship's teachings was Diocleasian Lewis. Dio Lewis was convinced that too much heavy lifting could be detrimental to health, and what was preferred was the use of light apparatus that would help develop flexibility and cardio-respiratory efficiency. Lewis probably wrote and lectured more because of Windship that he would have otherwise. It was Lewis who was most instrumental in the 1850s in getting the Boston schools to put in a few minutes of his exercises as a regular part of their school day. These exercises Lewis developed were called the "New Gymnastics for Men, Women, and Children." His exercises weren't actually that original, as he copied ideas from Catharine Beecher and the German and Swedish gymnastics systems. Perhaps the only original exercise Lewis developed was the posture crown which a person wore while walking and sitting to improve his/her general carriage. This crown weighed from 3-100 lbs, and the possibilities of jerking one's head from the body with one awkward tilt was certainly a deterrent to slumping!!

The major equipment used by Lewis were light dumbbells, wands, wooden rings, and bean bags. He was also the first physical educator in the United States known to use a special uniform. His gym suit was patterned after the costume a suffergett had developed

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in defiance of public dress customs. In the 1850s a U. S. senator had taken his daughter with him on a trip to Turkey. The young woman, a believer in greater women's rights, brought a pair of the full Turkish trousers home with her. Amelia Bloomer, a bit more bold that the Senator's daughter, took the pants and made a skirt, jacket, and a parasol to match, and became the first woman known to wear pants in public. The newspaper reporters, for lack of a name fo give the full pants, referred to them as those "bloomer" things, and the word stuck and became the name of the first gym suit for women.

Now for a rare treat, we have managed through supernatural forces to have a class of Dio Lewis' studerts to demonstrate some bean bag and wand drills.

Lewis Demonstration

Lewis' most important contribution was beginning the first teacher preparation program in the United States. His Normal School opened in 1861 and certified teachers after 10 weeks in his program. This same year one of our true giants in the profession was hired at Amherst College. There for 50 years, Edward Hitchcock was responsible for more "firsts" in our profession than probably any other physical educator. He developed the first significant required college program for physical education, founded the first campus infirmary, was the first medical doctor hired to head a college program, began the area of tests and measurements along with

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Dudley Sargent, and was elected the first President of AAHPERD, then the Association for the Advancement of Physical Education when it was founded in 1885.

The 1860 decade was a paradox, as some of the most significant early advances in physical education began that decade, and yet it was then that the Civil War all but caused what few physical education programs there were to be replaced with military training. Most significant in retarding the growth of physical education programs was the 1862 Morrill Act. By providing grants of land for colleges, the government received in return a promise to provide military training for its male students. As is sometimes still the case with the uninformed, military training and physical education were seen as being substitutionary, and through the 1870s physical education was often neglected at the expense of military drill.

After fighting for survival, the 1880s brought about optimism, growth, and a barrage of electric personalities that even surpassed the 1850s and the early 1860s. Some of the most significant personalities of this period were Dudley Sargent, Delphine Hanna, William Anderson, and Amy Morris Homans. Sargent, who had seen his ministerial ambitions thwated by inadvertently swinging from a pipe in church during a Calvinistic sermon, became one of the strongest leaders in the young physical educaion profession. He contributed to teacher preparation by beginning his program at Harvard, and for initiating the first summer school for physical education teachers. He was most noted for his work in tests and measurements and for creating some of the earliest testing apparatus in the field. Sargent served as the 3rd, 5th, and 8th president of AAHPERD, the

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only person to be elected on three separate occasions.

Amy Morris Homans, sponsored by philanthropist Mary Hemenway, made significant contributions to the promotion of women physical educators by founding and directing the Boston Normal School of Gymnastics. This school became the leading source for preparing women leaders in the new profession. Many well known graduates came from the BNSG, such as our own Mabel Lee, the first woman President of our Association. Also, with Hemenway's financial support, Homans hosted the 1889 Boston Conference that promoted some type of physical education in the schools more than probably any other single factor.

In 1885 twenty-five-year old William Anderson founded the Association for the Advancement of Physical Education, forerunner of the AAHPERD, whose centennial birthday we are celebrating now in Atlanta. Those sixty people who met at Adelphi Academy at Anderson's invitation represented diverse groups, and 49 of them became members of the new physical education organization originating out of that meeting. In this 100 year period our professional organization has continued to grow and show diverse interests through its many associations, academies, and councils.

Delphine Hanna was one of the most dedicated early physical educators; she used her own salary to buy equipment needed for the program at Oberlin College. She was the first woman physical educator known to apply the science of anthropometry in her program, one of the first women to earn professorial rank, one of the first to have a medical degree, and one of the first to teach in a coeducational college. Because Hanna's ideas were furthered through

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her students, she often isn't recognized for the role she played in the formulation of the "natural movement" that was being promoted early in the 20th century. Two of her more famous students at Oberlin, Thomas Wood and Luther Gulick, took Hanna's idea of surplanting the formal gymnastics systems with sports and games and consequently helped to Americanize the physical education curriculum early in the 20th century.

By the last decade of the 19th century, physical education, usually in the form of foreigh gymnastics, had permeated many schools and colleges across the United States. The main "systems' being routed were the Swedish, German, Sargent, and Hitchcock, with the Delsarte and remnants of Beecher's and Lewis' exercises often included. The German gymnastics were considered much more colorful and entertaining because of the free-flowing movements performed to music, but the advocates of the Swedish gymnastics believed their exercises were more educational because of their scientific foundation. Homans and Anderson were two of the strongest American proponents of the Swedish system; Baron Nils Posse, a young Swede, did much to further the cause of Swedish gymnastics. Posse taught classes to the Boston public school teachers and instructed the first students at the Boston Normal School of Gymnastics in 1889. This was a two-year course to prospective teachers of physical training. In January 1890 Posse resigned and Claes J. Enebuske took his place and remained until 1898.

Posse opened his own gymnasium in February 1890; he stated that it "enabled him to propagate the system on a larger scale from a school of his own." Posse believed that the Swedish system was the

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only truly scientific or rational system and would prevail over all others. (Sorry, Mr. Lewis!!) It only used movements that would effect development or needed corrections and used exercises that did not violate any laws of physiology, physics, or psychology. All exercises were placed in order according to the laws of progression.

On June 24, 1890, the Boston School Committee ordered that the Ling or Swedish system of educational gymnastics be introduced into all into all the public school of the city. This mandate made for a shortage of trained teachers even though many and enrolled in the voluntary courses. Dr. Edward M. Hartwell was appointed Director of Physical Training for the Boston schools in 1890 and the program he organized served as a model for many years.

The Boston Normal School of Gymnastics later became the Department of Hygiene and Physical Education at Wellesley College. The Posse Gymnasium became the Posse-Nissen School and in 1942 merged with the Bouve-Boston School of Physical Education.

On this special occasion we have an 1890s class from the Boston Normal School of Gymnastics that will demonstrate the Swedish gymnastics for us. They will perform the first days's order, first series which are suitable for classes of children from the age of 6 to 12 years.

Swedish Gymnastic Demonstration

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Although the 1890s was a decade of great formality characterized by students who were required to stand on footprints painted on the gymnasium floor, obey commands given in militaristic fashion, and even march to pick up their equipment so they wouldn't get out of step, the seed for change had been planted. Thomas Wood from Columbia University and Luther Gulick from Springfield College were leading advocates for moving from dumbbells, Indian clubs, wands, and other formal gymnastic apparatus drills to sports, games, and dance. The revival of the modern Olympics in 1896 by Baron Pierre de coubertin played a definite role in further stimulating the sports movement in the United States and around the world.

In the formative period, 1850-1900, physical education was philosophically viewed as an education of the physical with health and discipline being its primary objectives. It was a time when medical doctors were the leading physical educators, and when formal gymnastics comprised a curriculum practically void of sport. It was a time of magical names, a time of growth and development, and a time sometimes dominated by an overriding militaristic spirit. It was an important period of growth and development that contributed immeasurably to our present status. We salute those early great leaders and the way we were.

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